

*Talking about Retirement with Horace and Morikuni*

The city beckons. Shall we surrender  
to its embrace? That tough hug cracks ribs.  
My fellow-citizens ask themselves  
why I like to stroll through their porticoes  
but show no sympathy for their views:  
who would not thrill to their enthusiasms,  
feel contempt for last month's favorites?  
A bedridden lion once invited a careful fox  
to his den. "No thanks," said the fox,  
"the footprints all go in, but none come out."

Imagine a mountain in the south  
country, a high valley where the blue flower  
blooms in secret. Every character  
draws from solitude. Alongside the hut  
the path climbs out of sight. Time  
is measured drop by drop in the unending  
thunder of the waterfall's cataract.  
If you remember the little hut, the flower,  
the waterfall, the path, you know  
how very good it is to pass unnoticed.

Paul Merchant